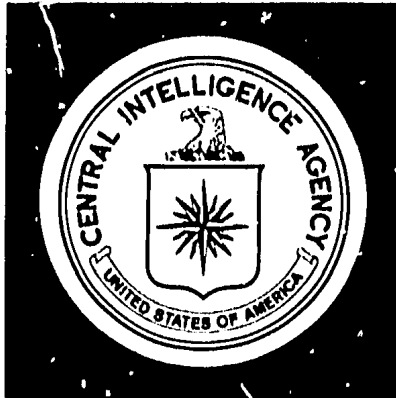


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Development in Indochina

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Developments in Indochina

This publication was prepared by the East Asia - Pacific Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Looking toward a fight for recognition in the UN General Assembly, President Lon Nol has reorganized his cabinet, creating three new vice - prime ministers and broadening the base of his government. In Peking, Sihanouk has tried to counter criticism that he heads a government in exile by turning over most of the positions in his government to the leaders of the "internal resistance" in Cambodia.

NORTH VIETNAM. 4

Pham Van Dong concludes military and economic aid talks with East Germany. This year's main rice crop is likely to show little improvement over last year's mediocre harvest.

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Communists plan for increased military activity. Thieu's forces have won all the leadership positions in the National Assembly, ensuring strong support for all of the President's legislative program. The President replaces two economic ministers.

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CAMBODIA

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Political Changes and Prospects

After some protracted maneuvering, government leaders in Phnom Penh have moved to resolve several important political problems. In a bid to strengthen Prime Minister In Tam's ineffectual government, the High Political Council on 21 October approved a new 29-member cabinet. Only two ministers were dropped from the previous cabinet, including the inept defense minister. Four of the 17 holdovers were assigned new duties.

The most noteworthy aspect of the new cabinet is that it includes three vice - prime ministers. The first of these is former prime minister and Socio-Republican Party Secretary General Hang Thun Hak. He is charged with maintaining relations with the legislature and coordinating foreign affairs--including possible peace negotiations. The second vice - prime minister is Republican Party official Op Kim Ang. Besides serving as public works minister, Op is responsible for coordinating community development activities. The third vice - prime minister is General Thappana Nginn, who holds the defense portfolio and who also coordinates the activities of the information and veterans departments. Coordination of the important economic sector will be handled by a relatively low-ranking cabinet member, Khy Taing Lim, who will retain the Ministry of Plans.

Both Hak and Nginn are supporters of President Lon Nol, while Ang is loyal to Sirik Matak. Lon Nol evidently persuaded In Tam to accept the vice - prime minister concept--and go along with the appointees--by giving the Prime Minister the Ministry of Interior portfolio, which he had long coveted. In Tam will also be responsible for "general mobilization."

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Lon Nol presented the new cabinet to a joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate on 23 October. He also formally announced the continuation of the High Political Council as the country's ruling body. In addition, he requested the reconvened legislature to adopt special, rapid procedures for the passage of certain important laws--especially in economic and financial matters.

The President's presentation was a pro forma exercise because his requests have already been approved by the heads of both houses of the legislature, by leaders of the Socio-Republican and Republican parties, and by his fellow members of the council. The occasion did, however, mark the end of the legislature's six-month suspension. Although In Tam, Cheng Heng, and Sirik Matak had earlier voiced varying degrees of opposition to its recall, Lon Nol apparently won their support by allocating cabinet portfolios to their political backers.

These latest political arrangements are a mixed bag. On the positive side, Phnom Penh can point to a greater sense of political unity because, for the first time in over a year, representatives of the opposition Republican Party are playing an active role in the government. Governmental performance should improve somewhat because of the addition of the three vice - prime ministers, all of whom are reasonably competent. On the negative side, the new government is not likely to be any more popular than its predecessor, and the cabinet may come under public criticism for the excessive number of posts it contains.

More important, however, the new cabinet is not likely to bridge the growing gap between the military establishment and the civilian leadership. This rift was particularly evident on 21 October, when Cambodian Army commander in chief General Fernandez complained to the US charge about alleged civilian shortcomings. Fernandez voiced concern that Phnom Penh would lose

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its seat at the United Nations because of civilian incompetence, expressed irritation that the army is "neglected," and expressed anxiety that civilian politicking would undercut the war effort.

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Sihanouk's Latest Statements

Sihanouk has claimed that there are to be some important changes in his "Royal Government of National Union" (RGNU). The Prince told the press in Peking on 20 October that all posts within the RGNU--except the Foreign Ministry--will be turned over to leaders of the "internal resistance." He added that the present holders of RGNU posts who are in China, the Soviet Union, France, Yugoslavia, and Senegal, would become ad hoc "chiefs of mission" in those countries. Sihanouk explained that these moves would prevent "enemy governments" and the Western press from characterizing the RGNU as a government-in-exile. Although he did not say so, the changes are clearly aimed at giving more ammunition to those at the United Nations who have been touting the RGNU as Cambodia's only legitimate government.

Sihanouk did not name a new cabinet. Most of the individuals who are losing their cabinet posts are members of his own entourage. A cabinet that is chosen from among insurgent leaders in the field presumably would be less responsive to the Prince. At the present time, the practical importance of such a shift would be minimal. Although Sihanouk did not so portray it, such a cabinet shift could represent a behind-the-scene deal between the Sihanoukists and their opponents within the government.

Sihanouk reportedly has also again asked Peking and Hanoi for "substantial material military aid" to counter US support to the Lon Nol government. In a telegram to a US press outlet in Tokyo on 21 October, Sihanouk stated that he had explained to the Chinese and North Vietnamese that aid could now be provided because the US had "disregarded" Article 20 of the Paris Accords.

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NORTH VIETNAM

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Pham Van Dong Ends Visit
to East Germany

The North Vietnamese appear to be fairly satisfied with Pham Van Dong's visit to East Germany. Although the final communique described the talks only as proceeding in an atmosphere of "friendship and mutual understanding," earlier press items were a little more enthusiastic. It is possible that the North Vietnamese lost some of their enthusiasm as talks got down to specific issues. The wording of the communique, however, indicates that Hanoi got Pankow to express its support for basic North Vietnamese policies. The Hanoi press announcements indicate that an agreement on military aid was reached, although the final communique mentions only reconstruction and other economic and technical aid. Probably following the Soviet lead, Pankow chose to play down military aid by not mentioning it in the communique.

Pham Van Dong is now visiting Czechoslovakia and apparently will travel to Albania afterwards. His subsequent plans are unclear.

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Run-of-the-Mill Rice Crop

This year's main autumn rice harvest is likely to show little improvement over last year's mediocre one, even though there is no US bombing to contend with. The October-November paddy harvest will probably not exceed 2.8 million tons, primarily because of unfavorable weather conditions. Drought plagued the beginning of the season, and heavy rainfall during the transplanting period destroyed some seedlings and waterlogged paddy fields. North Vietnam has also been hit with six tropical cyclones this rainy season, which caused minor but not serious flooding in several areas.

The North Vietnamese Central Agricultural Commission seems to have recognized that rice production alone cannot satisfy the food needs of North Vietnam's growing

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population. At a recent meeting, the commission pushed for increased production of corn as one way of solving the country's annual deficits. North Vietnam now produces an estimated 300,000-400,000 tons of corn annually, as a supplemental crop in the delta and lowlands area and as a primary crop in the highlands. Acreage can be expanded in remote areas unsuitable for rice; many marginal lands now used for rice production could more profitably be used for corn. Moreover, corn would be of primary importance should the regime pursue its often-expressed desire to increase animal production.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Communist Plans for Increased
Military Activity

A growing number of reports suggest that the Communists plan increased military activity in South Vietnam during the next few months.

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COSVN plans to conduct limited attacks from now until the end of the year, particularly in the provinces where government forces allegedly are "encroaching" on Communist-controlled territory. Another reason cited for the planned Communist step-up is a shortage of rice in Communist areas and a consequent need to gain maximum access to the autumn rice harvest by breaking down government economic security measures.

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Most of the reported Communist offensive plans are focused on Military Region 3 surrounding Saigon, notably in Tay Ninh Province but all regions are said to be included in COSVN's orders. Several sources have stated that Communist forces in northern Quang Ngai Province in Military Region 1 are to interdict Highway 1 to try to reassert control over areas "captured" by the government since the January cease-fire. Some sources imply that the activity is a prelude to heavier fighting. In Thua Thien Province, a rallier claims that from now until early 1974, the Communists will attempt to gain control of more land and people, after which they will begin a major offensive against Hue.

A recent assessment by analysts of the South Vietnamese Army's Joint General Staff in Saigon concludes that the Communists are capable of launching a "general offensive" early in 1974, including limited attacks against populated areas such as Saigon, Bien Hoa, Hue, and Danang. The assessment is based on a presumption that there has been a significant improvement in Communist unit strength and firepower in Military Regions 1 and 3 since the cease-fire. The South Vietnamese believe Communist capabilities in the central highlands and the delta remain limited. Despite more dire predictions, it is probable that the objective of any early Communist attack would be to deter South Vietnam gains in Communist-controlled areas without provoking a total breakdown of the Paris cease-fire agreement.

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A Government Dominated Assembly

The National Assembly finished organizing for the 1973-1974 term last week, and pro-government forces are now in firm control of both houses. In the Lower House, which has been under government control for some time, government strength has been increased by about 12 former independent or opposition deputies. President Thieu apparently can count on the support of nearly two thirds of the 159-member Lower House.

The government slate of candidates for Lower House officers and committee chairmen ran unopposed because of an opposition boycott of the vote. Nguyen Ba Can was re-elected chairman, but most of the other posts went to new faces, apparently to give a different set of pro-government deputies a chance.

In the Senate, the pro-government candidates for officers and committee chairmen were also elected without opposition. They will replace the group of independent and opposition senators who controlled the previous session. Former foreign minister Tran Van Lam has become the new Senate chairman. The size of the vote for the government candidates indicates that Thieu will control between 40 and 45 votes of the 60-seat Senate.

The government's position in the Assembly means that Thieu can secure passage of his legislative program with little difficulty and that the current Assembly session may be quieter than those in the past. Thieu, however, reportedly plans to propose constitutional amendments to strengthen his position. This would require the approval of two thirds of the total Assembly membership. Although the government camp is still a few votes short of this number, Thieu has sometimes successfully used pressure tactics in the past to persuade independents to vote for his proposals.

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Cabinet Changes

The cabinet reshuffle announced by the government on 23 October appears to have brought several new technicians into President Thieu's top administration. The major changes are in the administration of economic policy, which has come in for criticism recently as a result of sharply rising prices and rice shortages. Both Economy Minister Ngoc and Finance Minister Trung, who have been under particularly heavy fire, have been replaced by little-known bureaucrats. No new assignment has been announced for Trung, but Ngoc is to assume a position under the Prime Minister's office in charge of planning. The scope of Ngoc's new assignment is not clear, but the US Embassy speculates that he may be given general leadership of economic policy and planning.

Further changes will probably be announced soon, since there are several vacancies yet to be filled. The foreign affairs and health ministries, for example, have been without permanent leaders since their ministers left last summer to campaign successfully for Senate seats.

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